

Foreword

The White Paper “Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation” (Department of Health, 1999) proposed the establishment of Public Health Observatories (PHOs), one in each NHS region of the country, to strengthen the availability and use of information about health at local level. The Public Health Observatories were launched in 2000 by Yvette Cooper, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health, and Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer. The White Paper proposed that the role of Public Health Observatories would be to support local bodies by:

- ◆ Monitoring health and disease trends and highlighting areas for action.
- ◆ Identifying gaps in health information.
- ◆ Advising on methods for health impact assessments.
- ◆ Drawing together information from different sources in new ways to improve health.
- ◆ Carrying out projects to highlight particular health issues.
- ◆ Evaluating progress made by local agencies in improving health and reducing inequality.
- ◆ Looking ahead to give early warning of future public health problems.

Observatories are now well established and well recognised in their role of supporting public health in England. As part of this, Observatories are making a major contribution in the area of measuring and monitoring inequalities in health. For example:

- ◆ We have developed a local basket of indicators for use by local authorities and primary care trusts, to help them identify needs and to monitor and evaluate local public health programmes.
- ◆ We have developed the Health Poverty Index (HPI), an index announced in the NHS Plan, that combines data about each population’s health status, access to health services, uptake of preventive services and the opportunities to pursue and maintain good health.
- ◆ We have been commissioned by the Chief Medical Officer to produce a series of reports presenting indicators of public health for the English Regions. The first of these reports was published in January 2004.

In addition to providing our stakeholders with local intelligence, they have asked us to provide them with methodological advice and support. In the South East Region, people requested the South East Public Health Observatory to develop a resource to assist them with the methodological issues in measuring health inequalities. The South East Public Health

Observatory commissioned this work from Roy Carr-Hill and Paul Dixon, at the University of York. This book is the outcome of that request.

We hope that this book will be useful for all those involved in measuring health inequalities for both policy and practice. The book, commissioned by the English Public Health Observatories, inevitably has an English focus, but we believe it will be of use to people from other parts of the United Kingdom and to people in other countries.

This is the first version of this book. The on-line format allows for frequent updating. Thus, please let us have all your comments and feedback so that we can continually improve it. In addition, a published edition will be available in the near future.

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